

San Francisco Accessible Parking Fact Sheet 2013

Disabled parking placards and blue zones are meant to increase access for people with mobility disabilities by enabling them to park close to their destinations. Current policies are failing to achieve this goal.

Blue zones

Blue zones are intended to ensure that people with disabilities can park close to public destinations, and only those with valid disabled parking placards can park in them. Blue zones are marked by signage and blue curb paint and are generally located in areas with high public use, such as commercial areas and areas near public parks and playgrounds.

San Francisco has 29,200 metered parking spaces and approximately 700 unmetered on-street blue zones, representing 2.4% of metered spaces.

Disabled parking placards and license plates

Governed by California state law and issued by the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), disabled parking placards and plates enable users to park in on- and off-street blue zones and exempt users from time limits and meter payment at metered on-street parking spaces.

ELIGIBILITY

Individuals who meet eligibility criteria related to limited mobility, reduced sight, cardiovascular or pulmonary conditions may apply for a placard. Full eligibility requirements can be found on the DMV application:

<http://apps.dmv.ca.gov/forms/reg/reg195.pdf>

CERTIFICATION

Applications for disabled placards are completed by an individual's doctor, chiropractor, optometrist, physician's assistant, nurse practitioner, or nurse midwife.



Mayor's Office
on Disability



The DMV's database system is decades old and unable to verify or track information about who is certifying for placards.

INCREASING NUMBERS OF PLACARDS AND PLACARD USE

- San Francisco has twice as many disabled parking placards as metered spaces (29,200 metered spaces and 60,700 placards).
- There are an additional 454,000 placards issued to people in the other eight Bay Area counties, many of whom visit San Francisco.
- Placard issuance in the nine-county Bay Area has increased by 100% since 2001. Between 2001 and 2010, the Bay Area population increased by 5 percent and the 65+ population increased by 16 percent.
- Legitimate placards are sometimes misused by people they don't belong to, increasing rates of use.
- A 2008 SFMTA survey found that 45% of parking meters were occupied by cars displaying placards in the downtown study area. Of the vehicles using placards, 57% were registered outside of San Francisco.

Disabled parking placard enforcement

SPECIALLY TRAINED TEAM

The SFMTA has a team of 14 parking control officers (PCOs) plus one supervisor that dedicates all of its time to enforcing placard abuse.¹ This team conducts stakeouts and twice-weekly stings, confiscating roughly 1,800 placards per year. All officers currently help enforce accessible parking, issuing citations for blue zone infractions, ramp obstructions, and expired placards. They do not confiscate placards or attempt to catch misuse.

The most common form of placard misuse appears to be non-disabled people illegally using other people's placards, but that's also the hardest to catch. Because placard holders can use their placards when getting rides from other people, even finding a solo driver using someone else's placard isn't enough; the PCO has to prove that the placard holder isn't nearby.

¹ The SFMTA recently increased this team from 11 to 14 PCOs based on recommendations from the Accessible Parking Policy Advisory Committee.

HIGH STANDARDS FOR ENFORCEMENT

- Citation for placard misuse: \$825 + immediate placard confiscation.
- Almost 60% of placard-related citations are contested and 12% of those protests go all the way to the CA Superior Court.
- 82% of challenged citations are upheld as valid.
- Disabled Placard Detail PCOs work in teams of two, to provide a witness for future hearings and protect officers from violence.
- Placard Detail PCOs spend a quarter of their time writing reports with details to overcome protests.
- Revenue generated by citations issued during placard enforcement does not cover the costs of enforcement.

Disabled parking placard policies across the U.S.

- California is one of 15 states that require cities to exempt placard holders from paying at the meter.
- California is one of 5 states that require both meter payment and time limit exemptions for placard holders.
- Introducing meter payment has helped open up parking in other cities. In Philadelphia, downtown parking availability increased from 2 to 13 percent when placard holders started paying at the meter.

Disability, income, and car ownership²

- In San Francisco, 50 percent of people with disabilities have low incomes, compared to 25 percent of non-disabled people.
- 16 percent of people with disabilities in San Francisco are both low income and have a vehicle available in their households.
- Two percent of low income people with disabilities commute by automobile.

² Source: US Census Bureau American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates, 2008-2010. "Low income" is defined as $\leq 200\%$ of the federal poverty line. Disabilities include all those measured by the U.S. census, not just mobility impairments.